

KYP**KEEPING
YOU POSTED**Headline news for busy
church editors

December 1995

Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

WELCOME HOME, AUDREY –

Back in the early '70s, Audrey Miller became the first member of her Catholic order to work for a Protestant organization when she joined the Christian education staff of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries. She then worked for UCC-related Hartford (Conn.) Seminary and as director of the National Council of Churches' Education for Mission/Friendship Press. Now the Homeland Board has elected her head of its division of education and publication.

A BEE IN YOUR CHRISTMAS

BONNET? – Or, how about 3,000 bees? For \$30 you can send an alternative Christmas gift – a pound of bees, queen and hive – from Heifer Project International to a subsistence farmer overseas. How about a cow for \$500, llama for \$150, water buffalo for \$250, a pig or a sheep for \$120 each? For the ultimate gift, send a Noah's ark of animals to 30 families for \$5,000. Make a check out to the UC Board for World Ministries, 475 Riverside Dr., 16th fl., New York, NY 10115. Indicate exactly what you want and earmark check for Heifer Project International.

WHEN IN ISRAEL, VISIT THE CHRISTIANS – No, this is not meant to be a glib headline. Many American church tourists do little more than walk in the footsteps of Jesus. But to visit only the archeological sites where Christ walked and not to meet living Christians is to shortchange one's religious heritage, says the UC Board for World Ministries. Israel-Palestine is the home of three of the world's major faiths, points out BWM's Middle East executive Dale Bishop, whose adherents continue to live there. "It's important that Christians visit not only stones," he says, "but the living stones who continue to bring holiness to this land."

BWM is asking any UCC-related tour to spend at least 30 percent of its itinerary in visits with Palestinian Christians and Muslims and to consult with the Middle East Council of Churches' office in Jerusalem, which is staffed with UCC missionaries Martin and Betty Bailey.

WHAT MAKES FOR A GROWING CHURCH? – You've got to welcome the stranger in your midst, says Patrick Keifert, president of Church Innovations Institute in St. Paul, Minn. His research shows that expanding churches devote almost half their ministry in "dynamic public worship and learning events for the community – where strangers are expected." And they devote half their program to "small relational groups" – gatherings of like-minded people with a particular interest, such as Bible study or social action. Very little time is spent on committees and business meetings. Declining churches, on the other hand, spend up to 40 percent of their energy in committees. Congregations cannot attract strangers unless they recognize that their church is not their private family property "but God's house where God is the host and we are all strangers together." Church Innovations Institute provides research and resources for local church renewal. Keifert was a featured speaker at the annual meeting of the UC Board for Homeland Ministries.

WE PRAY FOR YOU, MR. PRESIDENT – UCC President Paul H. Sherry was a member of a select group of church leaders who met privately with President Clinton in the Oval Office Nov. 18. In a "laying on of hands" ceremony, the ministers prayed for Clinton and encouraged him to resist budget cuts that would imperil the poor, the old and the sick.

OH NO! – The titles for two successive Sunday sermons were "Jesus Walks on the Water" and "Searching for Jesus."

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS –**For parents:**

- Drop your kids off at church school and go to church rather than home for another hour of sleep.

For pastors:

- Spend more time with your family.
- Use inclusive language in your sermons.

For church members:

- Insist your pastor take more time off.
- Pledge as much to church as you spend on entertainment.
- Talk to at least one stranger in church.
- Sit in the front pews.

MAKING CHRISTMAS FIT FOR

KIDS – Advent is a wonderful time to share the Christmas spirit with children. Here are some ideas for making the worship experience a happy one for all.

1. Make water and bathroom stops before you leave home.
2. Bring coloring books, crayons and quiet toys for wigglers.
3. If your children do wiggle, don't be too upset. Adults wiggle, too.
4. If you wear a name tag, have one for your children, too.
5. Provide children's offering money.
6. Arrive in time.
7. Be open to where kids want to sit. They often have strong opinions.
8. If a child asks a question, answer briefly. Don't say "shhh" or ignore.
9. Afterwards, talk to your children about the service. By sharing experiences, we all learn more.

– Our thanks to Scarsdale (N.Y.) Congregational UCC, where children and adults wiggle happily together

Keeping You Posted is edited by William C. Winslow and produced monthly by the UCC Office of Communication, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100.

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REFLECTIONS – on the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. "I'm now living alone in a house owned by the mission board. Next door, there is a couple in their 80s who have been helpful to me in settling into the neighborhood. One evening, they invited me into their home. They are nearly the same age as my own parents and had four children just as my parents did. I discovered that I was born the same year as their oldest child, followed by two boys and a girl born in the same years as my brothers and sister. I was moved to think that two families living on opposite sides of the world, whose children were born while our countries were enemies, can now live peacefully side by side. I think of a word used in the New Testament – reconciliation. It is a gift from God, from Christ, from one another that is transforming and life giving. I give thanks often for the experiences of reconciliation and hope that we may all join in the work of reconciliation wherever we are."

– by Susan Adams, UCC/Disciples missionary in Japan

CHRISTMAS SCAM – *Keeping You Posted* is normally in the business of publishing good news about the UCC, but there is a Christmas scam during the holiday season members should be aware of. Letters addressed to "Any Church" sometimes find their way to UCC congregations. The most recent letter is from a grandmother who wants to give her granddaughter some nice clothes for Christmas. She says she is elderly and gives an address in the Appalachians of North Carolina. The letter is a scam. This lady and her friends gather in "church" every week and send out 1,000 such letters. Donations and clothing pour in; they sell the clothing. There are lots of appeals at Christmas, most genuine. Check the legitimacy of the sender by calling the sender or, if there is no telephone listing, the nearest UCC church. Better yet, send a check to the UCC Pension Boards' Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross, 475 Riverside Dr., Rm. 1020, New York, NY 10115.

SILENCE THE CHURCH? – If some members of Congress get their way, churches, charities and nonprofit organizations will be prohibited from all public advocacy if they accept any federal monies. Under the so called Istook Amendment, a church that receives money for a day care hot lunch program, for example, would not be able to express its feelings on gambling. In a letter to 56 House members facing reelection in 1996, Jay Lintner, director of the UCC Office for Church in Society's Capitol Hill office said, "We have been encouraging churches to speak out on public issues and take moral leadership for their community. Do you really want to silence us on issues of poverty, race, gambling, abortion?"

There are already well defined and long standing rules defining the limits of church advocacy. But the proposed amendment, which could be attached to any bill, would stretch the definition of "lobbying" activities to meeting with government officials regarding policy or attempting to provide information concerning legislation or policy at the local, state or national setting. "We are appalled that you want to silence churches and other nonprofit organizations from speaking out on public issues," wrote Lintner.